PERILOUS ADVENTURES

AND

THRILLING INCIDENTS OF TRAVELLERS.

ADVENTURE OF A TRAVELLER IN HUNGARY.

(See Frontispiece.)



THIS story was told me, says a recent writer, by an Italian officer, who was serving, at the time he first learned it, with the 'Grande Armée' of Napoleon. It seems to me to contain one of the most striking, most dramatic, and terrible scenes that can be conceived, and I have only to regret that I lack the talent or power of telling the tale of horror so well as it was told to me.

It was a few weeks before the termination of the

short, but (for Austria) fatal campaign of 1809—that campaign which, begun nobly by the Austrians, ended in their seeing Buonaparte dictate to their prostrate empire from their capital, and shortly after claim as his bride the daughter of the sovereign he had so injured and humbled—that an Hungarian horse-dealer left Vienna to return to his home, which was situated in an interior province of his country.

He carried with him, in paper-money and in gold, a very considerable sum, the product of the horses he had sold at the Austrian capital. To carry this in safety was a difficult object just at that time; for troops, French and Austrian, were scattered in every direction, and he knew by experience, that it was not always safe to fall in with small parties of soldiers, even of his own country or government, (to say nothing of the French,) but that Croats, and wild Hussars and Hulans, and others that fought under the Austrian eagle, were seldom over-scrupulous as to "keeping their hands from picking and stealing," when opportunity was favourable or tempting.

The dealer, however, relied on his minute knowledge of the country he had traversed so often; on the bottom and speed of his thorough-bred Hungarian horse;—and having obtained what he considered good information, as to the posts occupied by the belligerents, and the range of country most exposed to the soldiery, he set out from Vienna, which he feared would soon be in the hands of the enemy. He went alone, and on his road carefully avoided, instead of seeking the company of other travellers, for he reasonably judged, that a solitary individual, meanly dressed as he was, might

escape notice, while a party of travellers would be sure to attract it.

By his good management he passed the Hungarian frontier unharmed, and continued his journey homeward by a circuitous unfrequented route. On the third night after his departure from Vienna, he stopped at a quiet inn, situated in the suburbs of a small town. He had never been there before, but the house was comfortable, and the appearance of the people about it respectable. Having first attended to his tired horse, he sat down to supper with his host and family. During the meal, he was asked whence he came, and when he had said from Vienna, all present were anxious to know the news. The dealer told them all he knew. The host then inquired what business had carried him to Vienna. He told them he had been there to sell some of the best horses that were ever taken to that market. When he heard this, the host cast a glance at one of the men of the family who seemed to be his son, which the dealer scarcely observed then, but which he had reason to recall afterwards.

When supper was finished, the fatigued traveller requested to be shown to his bed. The host himself took up a light, and conducted him across a little yard at the back of the house to a detached building which contained two rooms, tolerably decent for a Hungarian hostel. In the inner of these rooms was a bed, and here the host left him to himself. As the dealer threw off his jacket and loosened the girdle round his waist where his money was deposited, he thought he might as well see whether it was all safe. Accordingly he drew out an old leathern purse that contained his gold,

and then a tattered parchment pocket-book that enveloped the Austrian bank notes, and finding that both were quite right, he laid them under the bolster, extinguished the light, and threw himself on the bed, thanking God and the saints that had carried him thus far homeward in safety. He had no misgiving as to the character of the people he had fallen amongst to hinder his repose, and the poor dealer was very soon enjoying a profound and happy sleep.

He might have been in this state of beatitude an hour or two, when he was disturbed by a noise like that of an opening window, and by a sudden rush of cool night air; on raising himself on the bed, he saw peering through an open window which was almost immediately above the bed, the head and shoulders of a man, who was evidently attempting to make his ingress into the room that way. As the terrified dealer looked, the intruding figure was withdrawn, and he heard a rumbling noise, and then the voices of several men, as he thought, close under the window. The most dreadful apprehensions, the more horrible as they were so sudden, now agitated the traveller, who, scarcely knowing what he did, but utterly despairing of preserving his life, threw himself under the bed. He had scarcely done so when the hard breathing of a man was heard at the open window, and the next minute a robust fellow dropped into the room, and, after staggering across it, groped his way by the walls to the bed. Fear had almost deprived the horse dealer of his senses, but yet he perceived that the intruder, whoever he might be, was drunk. There was, however, slight comfort in this, for he might only have swallowed wine to make

him the more desperate, and the traveller was convinced he had heard the voices of other men without, who might climb into the room to assist their brother villain in case any resistance should be made. His astonishment, however, was great and reviving, when he heard the fellow throw off his jacket on the floor, and then toss himself upon the bed under which he lay. Terror, however, had taken too firm a hold of the traveller to be shaken off at once,—his ideas were too confused to permit his imagining any other motive for such a midnight intrusion on an unarmed man with property about him, save that of robbery and assassination, and he lay quiet where he was, until he heard the fellow above him snoring with all the sonorousness of a drunkard. Then, indeed, he would have left his hiding-place and gone to rouse the people in the inn to get another resting-place instead of the bed of which he had just been dispossessed in so singular a manner, but, just as he came to this resolution, he heard the door of the outer room open—then stealthy steps crossed it—then the door of the very room he was in was softly opened, and two men, one of whom was the host, and the other his son, appeared on its threshold.

"Leave the light where it is," whispered the host, "or it may disturb him and give us trouble."

"There is no fear of that," said the younger man, also in a whisper, "we are two to one; he has nothing but a little knife about him—he is dead asleep too! hear how he snores!"

"Do my bidding," said the old man sternly; "would you have him wake and rouse the neighbourhood with his screams?"

As it was, the horror-stricken dealer under the bed could scarcely suppress a shriek, but he saw that the son left the light in the outer room, and then, pulling the door partially after them to screen the rays of the lamp from the bed, he saw the two murderers glide to the bed-side, and then heard a rustling motion as of arms descending on the bed-clothes, and a hissing, and then a grating sound, that turned his soul sick, for he knew it came from knives or daggers penetrating to the heart or vitals of a human being like himself, and only a few inches above his own body. This was followed by one sudden and violent start on the bed, accompanied by a moan. Then the bed, which was a low one, was bent with an increase of weight caused by one or both the murderers throwing themselves upon it, until it pressed on the body of the traveller. There was an awful silence for a moment or two, and then the host said, "He is finished—I have cut him across the throat—take the money. I saw him put it under his bolster."

"I have it, here it is," said the son; "a purse and a pocket-book.

The traveller was then relieved from the weight that had oppressed him almost to suffocation, and the assassins, who seemed to tremble as they went, ran out of the room, took up the light, and disappeared altogether, from the apartment.

No sooner were they fairly gone, than the poor dealer crawled from under the bed, took one desperate leap, and escaped through the little window by which he had seen enter the unfortunate wretch who had evidently been murdered in his stead. He ran with all

his speed into the town, where he told his horrid story and miraculous escape to the night-watch. The night-watch conducted him to the Burgomaster, who was soon aroused from his sleep, and acquainted with all that had happened.

In less than half an hour from the time of his escape from it, the horse-dealer was again at the murderous inn with the magistrate and a strong force of the horror-stricken inhabitants, and the night-watch, who had all run thither in the greatest silence. In the house all seemed as still as death, but as the party went round to the stables, they heard a noise; cautioning the rest to surround the inn and the outhouses, the magistrate with the traveller and some half dozen armed men ran to the stable door—this they opened, and found within the host and his son digging a grave.

The first figure that met the eyes of the murderers was that of the traveller. The effect of this on their guilty souls was too much to be borne: they shrieked, and threw themselves on the ground, and though they were immediately seized by hard griping hands of real flesh and blood, and heard the voices of the magistrate and their friends and neighbours denouncing them as murderers, it was some minutes ere they could believe that the figure of the traveller that stood among them was other than a spirit. It was the hardier villain, the father, who, on hearing the stranger's voice continuing in conversation with the magistrate, first gained sufficient command over himself to raise his face from the earth; he saw the stranger still pale and haggard, but evidently unhurt. The murderer's head spun round confusedly, but at length rising, he said to those who

held him, "Let me see that stranger nearer; let me touch him—only let me touch him!" The poor horse-dealer drew back in horror and disgust.

"You may satisfy him in this," said the magistrate, "he is unarmed and unnerved, and we are here to prevent his doing you harm."

On this, the traveller let the host approach him, and pass his hand over his person, which when he had done, the villain exclaimed, "I am no murderer! who says I am a murderer?"

"That shall we see anon," said the traveller, who led the way to the detached apartment, followed by the magistrate, by the two prisoners, and all the party which had collected in the stable on hearing what passed there.

Both father and son walked with considerable confidence into the room, but when they saw by the lamps, the night-watch and others held over it, that there was a body covered with blood, lying upon the bed, they cried out, "How is this! who is this!" and rushed together to the bed-side. The lights were lowered; their rays fell upon the ghastly face and bleeding throat of a young man. At the sight, the younger of the murderers turned his head, and swooned in silence; but the father, uttering a shriek so loud, so awful, that one of the eternally damned alone might equal its effect, threw himself on the bed and on the gashed and bloody body, and murmuring in his throat, "My son! I have killed mine own son!" also found a temporary relief from the horrors of his situation in insensibility. The next minute, the wretched hostess, who was innocent of all that had passed, and who was, without

knowing it, the wife of a murderer, the mother of a murderer, and the mother of a murdered son—of a son killed by a brother and a father, ran to the apartment, and would have increased tenfold its already insupportable horrors by entering there, had she not been prevented by the honest towns-people. She had been roused from sleep by the noise made in the stable, and then by her husband's shriek, and was now herself, shrieking and frantic, carried back into the inn by main force.

The two murderers were forthwith bound and carried to the town gaol, where, on the examination, which was made the next morning, it appeared from evidence that the person murdered was the youngest son of the landlord of the inn, and a person never suspected of any crime more serious than habitual drunkenness; that instead of being in bed, as his father and brother had believed him, he had stolen out of the house, and joined a party of carousers in the town: of these boon companions, all appeared in evidence, and two of them deposed that the deceased, being exceedingly intoxicated, and dreading his father's wrath, should he rouse the house in such a state, and at that late hour, had said to them that he would get through the window into the little detached apartment, and sleep there, as he had often done before, and that they two had accompanied him, and assisted him to climb to the window. The deceased had reached the window once, and as they thought would have got safe through it, but drunk and unsteady as he was, he slipped back; they had then some difficulty in inducing him to climb again, for in the caprice of intoxication, he said he would rather

go to sleep with one of his comrades. However, he had at last effected his entrance, and they, his two comrades, had gone to their respective homes.

The wretched criminals were executed a few weeks fter the commission of the crime. They had confessed every thing, and restored to the horse-dealer the gol l and the paper-money they had concealed, and which had led them to a deed so much more atrocious than even they had contemplated.

